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ABSTRACT

This booklet is the first in a series designed to assist parents who are home-schooling their adolescent children and focuses on the socialization of home-schooled adolescents. The booklet advances the view that pivotal social experiences plus daily age-peer contact are not needed to produce socially competent individuals, that real world socialization will better prepare students for the challenges they eventually will face than will school-based socialization, and that looking at socialization as a goal may be fairly nonproductive. The articles in the booklet are: (1) "Ideas for Teen Homeschool Groups," including game days, book groups, gourmet clubs, newsletters, investment clubs, competitions, group music, classes, and physical activities; (2) "Volunteering," discussing reasons for volunteering, where to look for volunteer opportunities, working for organizations without volunteer programs, and creating a community service opportunity; (3) "Transition to the World of Work," providing ideas for researching career opportunities; and (4) "Learning to Fish: Networking," focusing on networking among home-schooling families. (KB)

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HAPPILY HOMESCHOOLING TEENS:

Moving Into the World

by Cafi Cohen

ED 446 841

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THE "S" WORD

by Cafi Cohen

It happened again last weekend. A new acquaintance, this one a mother with grown children, learned that we had homeschooled our children. Her most burning concern: what about *socialization*?

Paradoxically, the questioner had just spent an hour plus with our two kids, home for the holidays. Before she had learned about Jeff and Tamara's backgrounds, she commented about how outgoing, mature, and capable they seemed to be. Despite this observation, once she learned about our homeschooling, she couldn't help wondering about the "S" word.

There are specific scenarios, I believe, that prompt the concern of those unfamiliar with home education. "How do kids, especially teenagers, meet other kids?" "What about football games and the prom?" "What about graduation?" It's amazing how many questioners refer back to those supposedly pivotal, formative experiences when they first think about homeschooling.

For the sincere questioner, I often recount a small portion of our experience. Our kids left school in grades six and seven. Both had been doing well academically and had the usual contingent of age-peer friends. Jeff and Tamara were neither wildly popular nor outcasts, just average kids with average school social experiences, some good, some bad.

We decided on home education, principally for academic reasons (we simply thought we could a better job). Like many long-term homeschoolers, we continued homeschooling for many other reasons, among them flexibility, student autonomy, family closeness, fun, and – last but not least – socialization. Yes, socialization became one of our reasons for continuing to homeschool.

It was interesting. Our kids had friends when they attended school. But after a year of homeschooling, I realized they had *more* friends than they had had while in school. Of course, this was contrary to my expectations, just as it was contrary to the expectations of my new acquaintance, mentioned above. I will be the first to admit that I was initially confused by it all. Who would expect kids, especially teenagers, to have more friends in a homeschooling environment?

Watching Jeff and Tamara, though, it all became clear. Our homeschoolers had more friends because they had more *time* and *energy* for friends. That's what friends take – time and energy. As homeschooled teenagers, they had an abundance of both. No longer were my kids hobbled eight or more hours each day by busy work and educational administrivia. Instead, they worked on academics, generally completing them in the morning; both had had much more time to make and be a friend, to socialize.

Not only did Jeff and Tamara have more friends, they had more diverse friends. They were no longer restricted to kids in a one to two year age range, living in our zip code. Instead, they had younger, older, even adult friends – all from the larger community.

When we began homeschooling, we, like many other new homeschooling parents, looked for social outlets with the local homeschool support group. While our kids enjoyed many of the activities (things like Game Days, Geography Bee practice, a writing class, etc.) and were fortunate to meet nice teenagers this way, none became close friends. Homeschooling, in of itself, did not seem to be enough of a common tie, especially for the older kids.

Instead, we discovered that Jeff and Tamara were most likely to meet others and develop close friendships like adults

do – via neighbors, relatives, and existing friends – and while exploring their interests. They made friends of all ages though sports, 4-H, Civil Air Patrol, the church youth group and choir, and at various volunteer jobs. I observed the same thing among other homeschooled teenagers in our support group. Groups as diverse as The Society for Creative Anachronism, community drama productions, bands and orchestras, martial arts classes, art classes, and radio clubs provided social outlets for many of them.

During their high school years, both of our homeschooled teenagers had the opportunity to participate in all of the usual high school activities. Their friends – most of whom attended school – invited them to football and basketball games, school dances, and musical productions. One fall, Tamara attended homecoming dances at three different high schools (getting a lot of wear out of the single formal dress she made for all three events). Both kids were invited to proms and had the opportunity to participate in a formal graduation. One statewide support group offered one such ceremony, as did our local school.

So when people ask about socialization and homeschooling, I have to honestly reply that our principal problem was keeping a lid on it. The phone rang constantly. After less than a year of homeschooling, I could never put socialization on a list of homeschooling problems or challenges.

Other homeschooled teenagers report different experiences, of course. One 16-year-old told me, "I don't socialize a lot with people my own age, but then again, it's because I just don't have time, not because I'm homeschooled. I do my schoolwork, go to work, am VERY active in 4-H, eat, and sleep. I love most of what I'm doing and wouldn't have it any other way. We belong to a 400-family home education association, which offers monthly bowling, skating, teen club, and care group activities. I guess the bottom line is, if I want it, I can easily get it; the hard part is finding time."

In yet another family, the older homeschoolers spend most of their time on academic pursuits or in group family activities (10 children here!). They live in a remote location and seldom see outsiders. Their social contacts occur primarily, but not exclusively, in interactions with parents and siblings. Are the children (many now grown) shy and reclusive, as some alarmists might predict? Quite the contrary. They are poised, self-confident, hard working, *very* well educated, and generally pleasant adults. How bad is that?

My conclusions from my observations of our kids and of other homeschoolers are as follows.

Even though they are available in one form or another, those pivotal social experiences (proms and graduations) plus daily age-peer contacts are *not* needed to produce a socially competent individual. Many homeschooled teenagers grow into capable, poised adults without those experiences.

Second, while schools may want and need the general public to believe that socialization is one of the most important things they do, real world socialization experiences (regardless of the size of that world) far better prepare kids for the challenges they will face.

Third, looking at socialization as a *goal* may be fairly non-productive. As an adult, my best social interactions have occurred when sharing my interests with like-minded individuals. I don't think kids are any different. Urge your teenagers to follow their hearts; positive socialization will usually follow as a byproduct.

IDEAS FOR TEEN HOMESCHOOL GROUPS

by Cafi Cohen

Many homeschoolers find support for their interests in their communities. They join family and adult organizations like ski clubs, computer users groups, and Toastmasters. Other teens volunteer and work for pay. Some enjoy community youth-oriented groups like Scouts and 4-H. Our two teenagers were no exception.

Jeff lived and breathed Civil Air Patrol Squadron. He edited the newsletter, served as squadron commander, organized encampments, prepared classes, and much more. He also trained with a U.S. Diving Team, sponsored by our local parks and recreation department. Our daughter, Tamara, split her time between volunteering with local drama groups and singing in a very active church choir. Both kids joined 4-H and church youth group. They were on the go almost every day, sometimes spending more time away from home than if they attended school. We were lucky. We lived in cities that afforded our teenagers rich opportunities to explore their interests and meet people from a wide range of backgrounds.

Some homeschooling families have to work harder to help their teenagers find similar opportunities. Perhaps you live in a small town or rural area. Your teenager may want to make new friends. Or she may seek an outlet for a new interest. If so, consider organizing an activity with other homeschooled teenagers in your vicinity. Here are several tested do-it-yourself ideas.

GAME DAYS

When my preteens first began learning at home in the 1980's, we lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Through the existing citywide homeschool support group – and at the suggestion of my daughter – we began a monthly game day.

There were twelve to fifteen kids, ages eleven to sixteen, involved. We rotated meetings at members' homes and – depending on the weather – the kids played either indoor games like Monopoly and Scrabble and Trivial Pursuit and Twister or outdoor games like flag football and volleyball. Games needed almost no supervision and very little planning or special equipment. Moms also enjoyed the chance to sit and chat. The host family usually provided light refreshments.

BOOK GROUPS

One homeschooling mother recently posted the following outline for a teen book club. "This year we started a book study with our teens. Each month they read a book about a specific missionary. We then met and discussed the book, the missionary, and the country they worked in. The kids each brought ten questions about the book, the country, and so on. They formed teams to answer the questions. We usually bring food from the country and have a potluck. We also try to do some related activity – such as volunteering for the Salvation Army after studying William and Katherine Booth. When studying a missionary from China, we brought in Chinese carry out for lunch."

Looking for ideas for reading selections for a book group? For an academically-minded group, consider the Great Books Foundation list (see Resources for address). If you would prefer a list of more current material, check out the appendix of Nancie Atwell's book, *In The Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents*. Or better yet, begin with title suggestions from the members.

Teens like to "get out." Remember that libraries will often provide space for a book group. Other sources of free meeting

space are book stores (new and used) and churches.

GOURMET CLUBS

If you have ever joined an adult gourmet group, you know the basics – theme, time, place, cooking assignments. Any interested teen can organize a phone/e-mail list of teenagers, decide on a theme, find a site (usually a home), and set a meal date. Research recipes at the local library. Depending on the theme, participants either (1) cook at home and bring a meal contribution or (2) cook at the meal site. Either way, everybody eats! It need not even be a meal. Instead, build gatherings around appetizers or dessert. Here are some popular themes:

- Creative Pizza
- All Vegetarian
- Chocolate, Chocolate, Chocolate
- Finger Food
- Chinese Cooking
- Budget – Create a meal for less than 20 cents per person
- Soup and salad

NEWSLETTER

Computers have made self-publishing easy and fun. Within your group of teenage homeschoolers, you undoubtedly have one or more computer gurus who know more than all the adults. You also probably have several writers and artists. Put those talents together at monthly meetings, inject a little organizational guidance, budget for copies and mailing, and you have the makings of a homeschool newsletter.

Consider this editorial newsletter structure. It solicits monthly contributions from all participant families in three areas.

- Two to three paragraphs describing family activities (think travel, work, projects, sports, recreation, academic achievements, illness)
- Answers to two survey questions ("What are your millenium expectations?" or "What do you think of the bombing of Kosovo?" or "What's the best movie you've ever seen?")
- One extra item (quotation, movie or book review, recipe, calendar items like birthdays, jokes, great buys, pictures)

Also consider paperless publishing – either a web page or an e-mail newsletter. Both are fun and easy.

INVESTMENT CLUB

The mother of a North Carolina homeschooling family runs an investment club. Here, she kindly contributes a brief outline of their operations (thanks, Ann!). "My investment club was extremely simple. We met for about an hour the first day – to set up. After that, I accepted buy and sell offers for an hour-and-a half each week, immediately following our weekly support group meeting."

"Each member received a packet containing a fake $1000 certificate, some papers that they could submit for buy or sell orders, and two pages of instructions. In the instructions, I explained exactly how the stock pages were set up in the local paper. We limited each participant to buying up to three kinds of stocks, with each buy or sell order costing five dollars. Transactions were also limited to stocks listed on the New York Stock Exchange. We used the Tuesday morning local paper (Monday's closing price) as our price for each stock."

"Each week – with all the buy and sell orders – I computed a balance for each participant. I then printed out a spreadsheet – name, number of shares, name of company, price of stock for that day, total value of those stocks. As each week passed, I added more columns for the price of the shares that day, and their total value. This does not require fancy equipment. I did all the calculating on

paper -- the amount they made from selling & buying stock, subtracting five dollars for each transaction, plus their balance for the week. I did not provide any direction in how to investigate a company. I figured they could do that on their own, because I do not know much about it!"

COMPETITION

While competition is not for everyone, some teenagers love it. Competition can be serious or just plain fun. On the serious side, consider building group competitions around practice items for college admissions tests (Scholastic Assessment Test, SAT, or American College Testing Program, ACT). Teams of two to four kids (competing against other teams, of course) can attack, say, five SAT practice questions in ten minutes. Get practice questions from the SAT registration materials (available free at any high school counseling office) or at the website listed in resources sidebar. Teens will learn a tremendous amount when forced to explain their reasoning and answers to their teammates. Working in teams keeps any single individual from "looking dumb".

Here are suggestions for silly, but enjoyable, teen competitions:
Building domino cascades
Estimating number of M&M's in a jar
Redesigning of the worst freeway interchange in your area using construction paper, straws, and tape
Building card houses
Games like Pictionary

GROUP MUSIC

I teach handbells and recorders in a homeschool co-op. We borrow the bells from a church, which also donates practice space. Kids bought their own recorders (sopranos, altos, tenors, and basses – ranging from five dollars for a soprano to 250 dollars for a bass) and pay for their music (generally less than ten dollars per year). We rehearse one to two times weekly, depending on our performing schedule. Costs are very low. Almost anyone with a music background, including a teenager, can learn and teach recorder and handbells or choirchimes (a less expensive handbell substitute).

Other successful group music activities include choir, band, even orchestra. Begin a band by employing private high school music teachers, whose schedules can usually accommodate homeschool groups that meet twice weekly. Find a site (ask churches and other community meeting facilities), and split the teacher's fee among the participants.

CLASSES

If you have special expertise among your family, friends, or acquaintances – or among the homeschooling parents in your vicinity – use it!

Listen to this homeschooling mother's description of science classes she organizes for teenagers in her area. "I rotate biology, chemistry, physics and earth science each year. This year I had seventeen kids aged thirteen to eighteen. We did chemistry labs from *Experiences in Chemistry* (by Kathleen Julicher, from Castle Heights Press) and the Bob Jones University chemistry lab book." Typical labs?

- Molecular structure using molecule model kits
- Physical states (solid, liquid, gas), and physical changes (melting and boiling)
- Making soap
- Testing milk for antibiotics
- Testing soils for phosporous, potassium, and pH (with a kit)
- Extracting DNA from onions

This scientist-cum-homeschool-mom reports that she downloaded instructions from the Internet for this last activity (see sidebar). With an extraction buffer consisting principally of shampoo, DNA coagulates (and thus separates from

everything else) in the presence of ice cold rubbing alcohol. It is an example of real life chemistry, with all of the ingredients available at the grocery store.

HIKES & OTHER PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

We all need more physical activity, and most teens enjoy jaunts to local scenic trails. Lace up sturdy shoes. Take along water, sun and insect protection, and a map – and enjoy. No pressure, lots of camaraderie.

Other weekly physical activity that teens enjoy include bowling and skating (either ice skating or roller skating) and volleyball. Again, no pressure, and fairly inexpensive.

Okay, you are sold. *You* are ready to organize or at least supervise a teen activity. But your teenager is reluctant. How to convince him and others to participate? Here are some winning strategies:

- Avoid the terms "support group" or even "homeschool group." Simply begin an investment club or musical group or a newsletter.
- Get ideas from your teenagers. One support leader said that she never initiates an activity unless one of the teenagers suggests it.
- Encourage one or more teens organize and lead, if possible.
- Restrict the activities to older kids and adults. Find alternates for younger children.
- Always include food. "Books and Brownies" sounds like more fun than "Book Discussion Group"

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

-- John Donne

RESOURCES

SAT/PSAT Starting Points for Students and Parents http://www.collegeboard.org/toc/html/tocstudents000.html
Free test questions here for competitions, practice

Great Books Foundation 800 222 5870
http://www.greatbooks.com/
Reading lists for youth and adult great books programs

In The Middle: Writing, Reading, and Learning with Adolescents by Nancie Atwell (1987: Boynton/Cook Publishers)
See reading lists in appendix; book is out of print, get at the library or via inter-library loan

Rhythm Band Instruments
Fort Worth, Texas
http://www.rhythmband.com/
800-424-4724
Best prices on plastic recorders & choirchimes

Jeffers Handbell Supply
PO Box 1728
Irmo, SC 29063-1728
800 JHS-BELL
For handbells and the more affordable choirchimes

Castle Heights Press
http://www.flash.net/~wx3o/chp/
770-218-7998
Outstanding hands-on science materials

Utah Museum of Natural History Science Education Site;
http://raven.umnh.utah.edu/secondlevel/teen/teen.html
See category: *Teens, Fun Stuff to do at Home* including onion DNA extractions and other science activities

VOLUNTEERING

by Cafi Cohen

At age 13, our daughter Tamara volunteered one half day each week in a veterinary clinic. Her initial duties were mundane: filing, answering common questions, making appointments, and escorting animals and their owners to examination rooms.

Once she mastered those tasks and the staff had gotten to know her, Tamara progressed to weighing animals, taking vital signs, assisting with examinations and treatments, making up inoculations, and preparing laboratory specimens (all well supervised, of course). After several months, she could identify common microscopic veterinary parasites. Several times she was invited to observe and assist with biopsies and autopsies on dogs, cats, and horses.

Quite an experience! We ended up calling it Tamara's middle school Life Science course; and judging from some kids I have interviewed who took "real" middle school life science, Tamara learned a lot more. Unlike her schooled friends, she had no text, no exams – just real world biology, microscopy (with a much nicer microscope than you would find in any secondary school), parasitology, and a smattering of chemistry and math. It was nice for me, the homeschooling parent, also. My responsibilities began and ended with my chauffeuring duties.

Tamara escaped from the house, worked with a veterinarian who valued her contributions enough to write her a nice letter of recommendation, and learned some hands-on biology. She also experienced small clinic veterinary medicine from a "career" standpoint and reaped the intangible rewards (those warm, fuzzy feelings!) that accompany community service.

WHY VOLUNTEER?

Volunteer work has always been on my short list roughly titled -- for our kids' -- "You have no choice about this." (This short list also included daily reading and writing, math, household chores, basic computer skills, and exercise).

Others may argue for the benefits of prioritizing Physics or Latin or World Geography. But I feel teenagers will master those subjects when they need them IF they already have good communication skills, basic math proficiency, computer literacy, fit bodies, and an interest in community service and helping others.

To my mind, volunteer work and homeschooling are made for each other. While it is possible to attend school AND volunteer, homeschoolers -- who do not need to spend six to ten hours daily on classes and homework -- clearly have more time for such endeavors.

Volunteering offers homeschooled kids many opportunities and benefits. First of all, it gets them out of the house. Especially as they grew into their later teens, both of our kids looked forward to their community service activities. They viewed their volunteer positions not only as useful but fun. Through their volunteer jobs, they learned new skills, worked with teams of people, and made friends of all ages.

Homeschoolers who volunteer often develop relationships with adults who then serve as mentors and teachers. Many of the adults supervising our kids wrote letters of recommendation for them for paying jobs and college applications. It was wonderful to have so many unbiased references confirming their character and abilities.

In volunteering, homeschoolers sample working conditions in various fields. This may lead to an early start on a career. Or, as happened with our daughter, the

experience may convince a teen that his or her interests and talents lie elsewhere.

As much as she enjoyed the veterinary clinic volunteer position, Tamara decided that animal medicine was not for her. This beats an alternative I have observed too often: dreaming about veterinary medicine (or some other field) as a teenager and studying the subject in college only to learn later (in one's mid-twenties, after a great deal of time and money) that the actual working conditions hold no appeal.

Our kids had a several different volunteer jobs as older homeschoolers. Jeff worked for the Military Affiliate Radio System (MARS), helping servicemen overseas relay messages to their stateside families. Both kids volunteered in hospitals, Tamara in a day surgery unit and Jeffrey as part of a hospital transport unit.

Tamara entered computer data for our church. She also worked as a props manager for a community drama group. Jeff and Tamara both assisted in soup kitchens staffed by our church. One summer, Jeff and Tamara spent three weeks across the country in a poor neighborhood in Pittsburgh, renovating houses with teams of kids and adults.

In general, our teenagers much preferred the volunteer positions to some of their paying jobs. They found that the volunteer jobs involved more challenge and more responsibility.

For example, as a volunteer, Tamara had complete responsibility for procuring all the props for a community drama production. With her first paying job at a dry cleaner's, her most interesting task was making change. While making change *is* a dying skill in our county, it *does* get old.

From my point of view, as a homeschooling parent, the volunteer jobs often provided hands-on experience in fields that we could call "school". Tamara's drama work became Language Arts, as did Jeff's MARS time. The hospital work was Science; the soup kitchens generated interesting Civics discussions (as well as teaching them how to cook for a crowd, which, for all I know, may be a more valuable lesson!).

WHERE TO LOOK

Our two teenagers only had time to sample a small fraction of the volunteer opportunities available. They had homeschooled friends who volunteered in an incredible variety of settings: libraries, clinics and nursing homes, community drama and musical groups, radio and television stations, museums, political campaigns, community service groups like Habitat for Humanity, hobbyists groups, government agencies, private businesses, and even educational institutions like public schools!

We discovered that are basically three ways to volunteer:

- As part of an established volunteer program (these are common in libraries and hospitals and museums);
- For agencies or groups that do not have formal volunteer programs;
- By creating your own volunteer situation.

ESTABLISHED PROGRAMS

Volunteer programs in libraries, hospitals, and museums are especially easy to access as a homeschooler. Why? Homeschooled kids can work as volunteers during hours that most other kids attend school. When we lived in Albuquerque, the children's hands-on room of the science museum specifically recruited homeschoolers to help out with school tours and maintenance during the day.

Established volunteer programs usually require no experience in the field. Those who run these programs expect to train the volunteer. They will usually have an

award system to recognize time of service and special achievements. Often those settings with programs are the easiest way to begin volunteering.

Of course, the exception to this statement is that established programs usually have age restrictions; often the youngest age they will accept is 12 or 13. And you may have a ten or eleven year old who is ready for a volunteer responsibility. What then?

Proceed to other venues, *and* pursue libraries, especially about volunteering in outside the "program" (see sidebar). In organizations without specific programs, you may find someone more willing to work with a younger kid. Most notable examples in my experience are political campaigns and drama groups (for backstage work); both will take almost anyone.

Volunteering At The Library – it's more than just shelving books. Could your kids help with these tasks?

1. Computer/Internet docents: help library users with the information superhighway and other computer-related finding aids.

2. Storyteller: needed by most libraries that have children's sections.

3. Artists: create special events posters and do other graphics work for flyers, etc.

4. Friends of the Library workers: organizing book sales and planning special events.

5. Book repairers: learn techniques to extend shelf life.

If these sound interesting, there are many more. Ask your local librarian for the list "99 Ways To Volunteer At Your Local Library."

Also, this is a perfect time to think about family volunteering – some project on which you and your children work together. Activities like Meals On Wheels and community trail rehabilitation (in parks and wildlife areas) come to mind here.

With kids who just miss age cut-offs for programs, another tack to gain entry is to suggest a *trial period* for a couple of weeks. You might also propose both you (the adult) and your homeschooler working with the organization for a trial period. Observing your kid in action, they may make an exception to their age rules.

WORKING FOR ORGANIZATIONS WITHOUT VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS

Teenagers should always consider approaching all organizations of interest, not just those with volunteer programs. Preparation is key. Decide on a field of interest, list organizations devoted to that interest in your community, and write a resume.

The resume need not be heavy on "experience" (although experiences that document interest in the field should be included). The resume should include the following:

- WHY the teenager wants to volunteer with the organization in question;
- Any special skills (e.g. word-processing is always in demand);
- References (neighbors, coaches, music teachers, scout and 4-H leaders, and other adults with whom the kid has worked);
- Availability; be sure and point out that s/he is available during the day, not just "after school".

Have your older kids approach organizations without volunteer programs with a telephone call. The teenager should ask them if there is a time s/he might come in and talk to them about volunteering (always emphasizing that no task is too trivial – "I'll do whatever you need done."). If possible, begin with organizations where the family "knows someone," has a connection. Always

mention the connection during the initial phone call.

Be persistent. Tamara called twenty some-odd vets before she found one that would talk to her and give her a trial run. Be flexible. Maybe the local TV stations are not interested, but the local radio stations will welcome any help they can get.

When it comes time for an interview, urge kids not to be picky about assigned tasks. Teenagers who indicate a willingness to do any reasonable task will always be in demand. And, in time, they will be assigned increasing responsibilities commensurate with performance.

Volunteering Together: Three Neat WEB Sites

Family Volunteering:
http://www.meer.net/users/taylor/famvol.htm

Volunteering With Your Family:
http://www.impactonline.org/advice/family.shtml

Why Volunteer?
http://www.impactonline.org/advice/why.shtml

CREATING YOUR OWN COMMUNITY SERVICE SITUATION

Probably the most creative volunteer situations I have witnessed have come out of a deep interest in a particular field and networking like crazy to satisfy that interest. In New Mexico I knew one 13 year-old girl who was consumed with a passion for animals and was especially interested in animal rescue.

Even as a younger child, she collected materials from animal watchdog groups, wrote articles about animal welfare problems, and attempted to help injured birds, dogs, and cats. She all but ransacked the library for any material on rehabilitating injured animals.

She began volunteering at the local zoo – no program, here, just began cleaning cages, whatever they needed. At the zoo, she slowly worked her way up to helping the on-call veterinarian. More importantly, she met an adult wildlife animal rehabilitator, who became a mentor. Through the mentor, this young teenager eventually was assigned her own distressed animals to nurse back to health prior to release into the wild, a project she developed into a cottage industry.

This young lady did not wait for a program or permission or even formal training. She just did it. One thing led to another. And, eventually, she had her own volunteer situation, home-based, rehabilitating wildlife.

What kinds of non-program, non-organizationally-based opportunities might present themselves for a kid without a specific direction? Here's short list, to get you thinking:

- Picking up aluminum cans at the beach (in California, also a lucrative proposition) or detrashing any part of your neighborhood on a regular basis
- Visiting and reading to an elderly neighbor or friend
- Helping an elderly neighbor with yard work or house fix-up
- Tutoring younger children
- Rehabilitating throw-away toys and books and donating them to a children's hospital
- Reading to younger children
- Just look around you, and *see what needs to be done*!

That is the key. Urge your kids to brainstorm what needs to be done and then do it. You may be surprised at the ideas they generate. Second key? Parental example. Do *you* volunteer? Kids are much more likely to approach volunteering enthusiastically if they see a role model in the home.

TRANSITION TO THE WORLD OF WORK by Cafi Cohen

As homeschooling parents, we hope our kids will progress naturally from homeschooling into the world of work. We envision our children developing consuming passions and eventually using their talents to make a living.

For some kids, the path is obvious. The teenager who lived and breathed cars and motors volunteers at an auto repair shop, eases into a paying position, and in due time starts his own auto repair business. Or he enlists in the military, learns jet engine repair and maintenance, and eventually goes to work for a major airline. Kids like this just follow their noses, and everything turns out pretty well.

Others, even as teenagers, never seem to develop an interest that translates readily into a paying job or progresses to a career. Often these kids are good students. Many boast an impressive roster of extra-curricular activities. Some of them say, "Everything looks interesting. How can I narrow down my choices?" These kids need extra help to make the transition from home to the world of work.

Note that I said transition from "home to the world of work," *not* "home to the world of college." If a teenager is unsure of his direction, college will be a waste of time and money. I do not buy the old maxim: "Send 'em, and they will figure it out when they get there." Instead, send them out to work to determine if they need college. When and if they do attend college, it will be worth every cent. They will know why they are there and probably will do very well academically.

Homeschooling families are so lucky, homeschooling teenagers even more so. Homeschoolers bring an attitude of self-reliance plus a networking mindset to any first-job search. Many homeschooling teenagers absorb these qualities through years of watching their parents find appropriate resources.

Additionally, homeschooling parents and teenagers have *time* to explore various occupational fields. But how do you get started? What fields look interesting? What jobs are available in those fields? What resources are available to help older teenagers and young adults locate That First Job?

Ideally, plan to spend one to two years researching the possibilities. Check out the following resources in your community: friends, neighbors, and relatives; local newspapers; library reference holdings; career counseling centers and public employment offices; and volunteer and apprenticeship opportunities -- not necessarily in that order.

INTERVIEWING FRIENDS, NEIGHBORS, AND RELATIVES

Many people find jobs or begin careers based on exposure to occupations of friends, neighbors, and relatives. Encourage your teenager to set up interviews with those around him doing interesting work. Certain questions usually get the conversational ball rolling: What's the best thing about this job/work? The worst? What drew you to this work? Do you find the work satisfying or frustrating? Would you encourage others to seek similar employment?

NEWSPAPER HELP-WANTED ADS

The local newspaper help-wanted ads are another excellent place to begin. From these ads, your teenager can educate himself in a non-threatening manner about those occupations in sufficient demand to warrant advertising. (Job search manuals generally advise that most jobs are *not* filled through classified advertising, but instead through networking.) Encourage your teenager to

peruse the Sunday ads for many months to help him develop a picture of (1) the overall job market and (2) qualifications needed for various jobs. He should also note salaries offered for various positions. Just reading job descriptions may help him develop a feel for what type of work he would like to do.

LIBRARY RESOURCES

I queried the reference librarian at our small, local branch library about career research and job search materials they recommend. What a wealth of data. The non-circulating reference section (call numbers 331...) had the multi-volume, yet very readable, *Career Information Center*, 6th Edition, "for people who want help making career choices." Under each of the many careers listed was information about salary, education or training requirements, employment outlook, and trends. Also available were the *US Department of Labor Occupational Outlook Handbook* and the multi-volume *Exploring Tech Careers*.

The data in these resources is difficult to approach cold, that is, when the potential job-seeker (teenager) has no idea what direction to take. Bolstered with information from several months of reviewing want-ads, personal experience with several occupations through volunteering (of which, more, further down), and interviews with working friends and relatives, the data comes to life.

In the regular non-fiction section of the library (again under call numbers beginning with 331), I found materials about resumes, interviewing, and other job-search skills and techniques. There were also books on correlating your job search with your interests and talents.

One of these looked particularly appropriate: *What Color Is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual For Job Hunters and Career Changers* (updated annually) by Richard Bolles is an excellent how-to manual. It includes a sections on choosing a career ("What Do You Want To Do?" and "Where Do You Want To Do It?"); job hunting (including chapters on working at home and starting your own business), interviewing, and a "pink pages" section on finding your mission in life. Highly recommended.

A couple of other titles caught my eye. *The Off-The-Beaten-Path Job Book: You CAN Make a Living AND Have a Life!* by Sandra Gurvis (1995) detailed jobs like Greeting Card Writer, Tour Guide, Dog Groomer, Polygrapher, Midwife, and Product Tester, and many more. *Real People, Real Jobs: Reflecting Your Interests In The World Of Work* by David H. Montross, et. al. (1995) included stories of 40 people in traditional and not-so-traditional occupations. Certainly teenagers looking beyond the usual ways of earning a living and the usual job search techniques will want to check out these books.

CAREER COUNSELING SERVICES & EMPLOYMENT OFFICES

Through local school districts, adult education programs, community colleges, and in the Yellow Pages, you can develop a list of local career counseling programs and employment offices. Many of them offer free or almost free services including personal development classes, interest and skills inventories (tests), help writing resumes and preparing for interviews, time and financial management strategies, and job referral and placement.

I interviewed the coordinator at our local county career center (accessed here through the county adult education program) and got some excellent, general pointers for job searchers. She said that the primary skills and attitudes most employers want include good oral and written communication skills, the desire and ability to be a team player, and flexibility ("The key to survival."). According to the coordinator, the single most important asset any job seeker could

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present to an employer is computer literacy (ability to use a word processor, prepare a spread sheet, and manage files).

The coordinator (who works for a government agency) said that job-seekers should also consider talking to private employment and temporary employment agencies (those whose fees are paid by employers). The trick, she said, is getting one's foot in the door. Job-seekers should not turn their noses up at part-time, temporary positions and those with no benefits; those jobs may turn into full-time permanent positions.

VOLUNTEER & APPRENTICESHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Teenage homeschoolers volunteer in many areas. Most of us are familiar with the volunteer programs in libraries and hospitals and museums. Homeschoolers are wise to look beyond established programs, however. I have known homeschooled teenagers who volunteered with veterinarians, drama groups, political campaigns, radio stations, bookstores, etc. The possibilities are limited only, perhaps, by your location.

Why is volunteering important with respect to a future job? Volunteering allows teenagers to experience a wide variety of work environments and occupations, while contributing to the community. And the volunteer experience sometimes rules specific future employment in or out. Although she enjoyed the work and the people, our daughter learned that *none* of the medical professions was for her after volunteering for a year at a local hospital. Result? She didn't waste 2-4 years going to nursing school only to discover that she did not like health care.

Of course, results may be more positive: volunteering can lead to a paying job. The pages of *Growing Without Schooling* are replete with examples of teenagers who parlayed volunteer positions into full-time paid work. Even with no paying position in the offing, volunteering provides experience and generates all-important resume data. Additionally, the teenager will usually garner recommendations from adults who have worked with him.

How does a student get a volunteer job where there is no volunteer program in place? Just ask! Ideally, the teenager will present himself with a brief resume and letters of recommendation, together with a statement of why he wants to volunteer for the organization in question. Sometimes the big draw in giving a teenage homeschooler a volunteer opportunity includes the kid's availability during normal school hours. Be sure to let them know!

Certainly as your child moves from his middle into his late teens, he may be more interested in an apprenticeship. Many to most apprenticeships pay a salary while the apprentice is learning. Back to the library here. *Ferguson's Guide To Apprenticeship Programs* (reference section of our library) not only had information about trades we traditionally associate with apprenticeships (tile setters, tool and die makers) but also about less traditional options: folk arts apprenticeships, fire fighting, and horse trainers, for example.

Finally, it is difficult, almost impossible, for some 17-21 year-olds to make career decisions. Their interests are still changing so much from year to year. After doing the research and volunteering and doing everything else you can conceive, as a last resort, "Try *something*." Trial-and-error may be the best approach for some.

Some teens may also be comforted by the words of Donn Reed in *The Home School Source Book*: "There is nothing undesirable in having a variety of work, either concurrently or consecutively; a peripatetic career can be as remunerative and often more satisfying than the single-minded pursuit of only one kind of work.....Choosing a career should be done only if one *wants* a career."

LEARNING TO FISH

by Cafi Cohen

In person, and via the web, telephone and snail mail, I probably talk to 50-100 homeschooling families each month. During these discussions, I repeatedly hear the same query: Where can I find _____?

Fill in:
*An independent-study school for high-achieving teens
*Flying lessons
*Book with hands-on math units
*Driver's training
*Mentor for a future veterinarian
*Other teenagers
*Inexpensive microscopes
*Free, on-line Spanish course
*Grace Llewellyn's Homeschooling Camp for Teenagers
*Remedial Spelling Program

As a military family, we moved a *lot* when we were homeschooling. As a result, we all learned to find resources fast. I am also an information junkie and enjoy networking for other homeschoolers. But I can only do so much. My choice, often, is to give you a fish or teach you to fish. This article is an attempt to teach you to fish.

Why is networking important? Well, first, those of us with adult children are here to tell you that adolescence flies by. Your kids will be gone before you know it. Usually, to help your teenagers pursue their interests, you have days to weeks, occasionally months, to find appropriate resources. Waiting for wonderful educational opportunities to land on your doorstep is like anticipating the Publisher's Clearing House Prize Patrol. It might happen, but don't hold your breath.

Second, networking is important because good networkers usually find the best resources. Their networking activities typically yield several options. Linus Pauling had a point when he said, "The best way to get a good idea is to get *lots* of ideas."

Third, networking, in addition to creating a plethora of choices, saves money. Among the "lots of ideas" that they generate to satisfy a particular need, networkers often hit the educational equivalent of a two-for-one sale. By researching and increasing options, they enhance the likelihood of finding inexpensive and free resources.

The networking process also produces excellent evaluators, critical thinkers in educational parlance. With experience, good networkers filter worthwhile resources from the many options they discover. They develop their critical thinking skills, and so do their kids, almost by osmosis – which leads to the final point.

Good networkers raise good networkers. These parents know the importance of modeling and sharing these skills with their kids. Teenagers, especially, by observing and working with you, learn to locate their own educational resources. Networking allows older kids to assume responsibility for their own learning.

So, it is important to hone those networking skills. Let's address two areas: How To Look and Where To Look.

HOW TO LOOK

*Rule number one: *Ask Everyone*. Do you have questions similar to those above? If so, don't wait for the next homeschool support group meeting. Ask neighbors, family, friends, co-workers, and others. It is impossible to anticipate exactly who will direct you to free foreign language lessons or an opportunity to volunteer at a radio station.

If you are shy about this, remember that most people love the questions: "Could you give me some advice?" or "What's your opinion?" Do not ask for help or resources

or time; ask for advice. Sometimes you will get both – advice *and* help, resources, time!

*Second: *Go To The Source.* This is a real sticking point. I am constantly asked questions beginning with the phrase, "I heard that college X requires. . . ," often followed by the phrase, "and therefore we decided to. . ." These people are making a decision about today's activities and a future college based on second-hand information. Not a good approach – especially in view of rapidly changing policies.

I always ask them, "Well, have you called the college and asked them about this?" Never rely exclusively on "what somebody told you." Yes, second-hand information from other homeschoolers can be invaluable, informing you of pitfalls and questions to ask. Eventually, though, if you have a question about the state university, ask the personnel at the college. If you need information about insurance and driver's training, call insurance companies and local drivers' training instructors. If you have a query about the PSAT or the SAT, call the test administrators. If you are unclear about aspects of your state homeschooling statute or regulations, read the original sources for yourself.

*Third: *Focus.* This may not apply to you unless you are an information junkie, like me. Without blinders, I am doomed to failure. On one hand, I enjoy gathering interesting homeschooling information from all quarters. On the other hand, sometimes I too closely resemble the tourist who stops at *every* attraction. Result? Tired feet and a blur of impressions – in other words, *no* result.

*Fourth: *Evaluate Your Sources.* When you obtain information about college admissions or standardized testing or curricula or community resources, ask yourself about the background of your source. Can you trust what that he tells you? Does he have the expertise to answer your question? Ask your source to justify his or her statements: "Why do you think/believe that?"

*Number five: *Consider Alternatives.* When we moved to Denver and needed a sport for our 15-16 year-old son, we considered running (anyone can train for and run road races) and martial arts (provided by private studios). Finally, though, a local homeschooler pointed out a world class diving program just a stone's throw from our house. After checking out the program and the coach, Jeff joined the diving team, thoroughly enjoying it. It was invaluable for his U. S. Air Force Academy application.

*Rule six: *Be Persistent.* Don't give up. If one avenue is blocked, explore another. We queried 10-15 veterinarians for a volunteer position for my daughter before we found one that said yes. Ross Perot says, "Most people give up just when they're about to achieve success, they give up at the last minute of the game, one foot from a winning touchdown."

*Number seven: *Follow-up Questions.* After you ask for advice, always ask: Who else knows more about this? What books would you recommend? Can you tell me about another approach to this situation? What would you do?

*Last: *Allow Your Kids To Learn These Skills.* How? Apply networking skills to any problem you have with curriculum selection, applying homeschooling approaches, finding community resources, and interpreting state laws and regulations. Then, work collaboratively with your teens on these information-gathering forays. Jointly evaluate the options your research generates. As your kids grow older, encourage them to assume more responsibility for research and evaluation.

WHERE TO LOOK

*The first part of Where To Look is the same as How To Look. Talk to people in your community – friends, relatives, neighbors – as well as other homeschoolers. Anyone can provide good information. My son found a source of free flying lessons from another teenager. My daughter got her first paying job through the supervisor of her hospital volunteer program. We heard about my daughter's foreign exchange program through the friend of a friend.

There is an adage that says you are never more than five people away from any piece of information. How's that? If you ask somebody for certain facts and he doesn't know, you then proceed to whomever the first person recommends. And so on. The adage assures us that information is never more than five people deep.

Write to well-known people. Is your teenager intrigued the work of a well-known cartoonist, computer game designer, snowboarder, architect, scientist, chef, musician, athlete, writer? Is she interested in emulating that person, getting advice? Encourage your teenager to write and ask for that advice.

*Next stop is the local library. Too many make the mistake of perusing the computer card catalog, deciding what they want is not there, and walking out. Depending on the objective, your library research is incomplete unless you have: (1) perused the community resources; (2) chatted with the reference librarian; (3) asked about inter-library loan for any books or materials not in your local system; and (4) checked into the WEB.

Almost all libraries have display tables, bulletin boards, and sometimes files devoted to community groups and resources. Some libraries even maintain a homeschooling file. At almost all libraries, you will find brochures from local parks and recreation departments, YMCA's, musical groups, team sports, and many hobbyists' groups. In larger communities, look for a free magazine detailing activities for kids of all ages.

Consult the reference/research librarian for information on apprenticeships, college at home, the GED, financial aid, and special programs like Space Camp or Talent Search. The reference librarian can also help you find excellent books, magazines, and videotapes on almost any topic. He may not know the exact information you seek, but he can get you one step closer to finding it by directing you to other libraries, government and private agencies, and so on.

To obtain materials *not* in your library's system, request an Inter-Library Loan form. For this short form, you will need the author and title of a book. At some libraries inter-library loan is free; others charge a nominal fee – fifty cents to a dollar is common. Typical waiting time is one to two weeks. Why more people don't use Inter-Library Loan to preview textbooks is beyond me. Wondering about *English From the Roots Up* or *Saxon Algebra I*, for example? If your local system does not have the text, just request it Inter-Library Loan, and borrow it for a trial run.

Finally, more and more libraries are making computer WEB access available to their patrons. The WEB is such an efficient information gathering resource, learning to use it is essential. If your library provides WEB access, not having a computer or modem (device for connecting a computer to the WEB) is no excuse.

Find sites for used/inexpensive curriculum, homeschooling kids with learning disabilities, free on-line Russian lessons, pen-pals around the world, writing contests, and much more. If you learned to drive a car, you can easily learn to navigate the WEB. With 15 minutes of instruction (5 minutes for kids!), most people are ready to begin researching.

*Schools. Teachers at colleges and local public and private schools can be a wonderful source of information and referrals. Curious about good hands-on resources for science? What about that inexpensive microscope? Call a biology instructor at your local high school or college. Occasionally, you will run across someone who does not have time for you, but most of these people live to give advice and will be flattered by your questions.

Through universities, we have found piano teachers (call the music department), special summer programs for high schoolers (extension or high school program office), and access to foreign language clubs (French or Latin or Spanish department). Through high schools, we have located lab supplies (science department), college preparatory reading lists (English and history departments), SAT and ACT registration materials (counseling office), and volunteer program information (also at the counseling office).

*The WEB. If you have a computer, but are not on-line, consider taking advantage of the free month offers of American On-Line, ATT World Net, or any of the other large Internet Service Providers. If you do not have computer, check with your library or even with a friend for WEB access to help you research resources. I would gladly give occasional WEB access to several homeschool friends – but no one has ever asked me!

On the WEB, you will want to acquaint yourself with one or more search engines. Search engines are simply sites onto which you enter one or more search terms – much like using the subject index in a library card catalog. For example, if you were looking for free instructional materials from NASA, you might try entering "NASA" as a search term or keyword. The challenge is to find search terms that are neither too broad (resulting in thousands of hits), nor too narrow (resulting in no hits).

My favorite search engines (this month) are InfoSeek <http://www.infoseek.com> and HotBot <http://www.hotbot.com>. If your kid is exploring the WEB for the first time, have him enter a search term for a current interest. Examples are astronomy, skiing, wildlife, and so on.

If you prefer browsing to generating your own search terms, let me also direct you to three great sites: Amazon.com Bookstore <http://www.amazon.com>, Homeschool Resource List <http://pages.prodigy.com/ct_homeschool/guide.htm>, and BJ Pinchbeck's Homework Helper <http://tristate.pgh.net/~pinch13>.

*Special Homeschooling Sources. Some homeschooling organizations and authors are particularly informative. They may not know the answer, but they can help you find who does. Here is my short list, together with examples of what they can provide.

American Homeschool Association <http://www.home-ed-press.com/AHA> is a free service organization supporting the continued growth of homeschooling by providing communications and networking for anyone interested in home education. They have resource files for all 50 states and publish an outstanding free email newsletter. Just email AHAonline@aol.com and request a subscription. For more information, call 907 746-1323.

Holt Associates, 2269 Massachusetts Ave., Cambridge, Massachusetts 02140-1226 (617 864-3100) <http://www.holtgws.com> publishes a subscriber's list (find teenage homeschoolers near you and families who have offered their home as a place to stay for traveling homeschoolers), pen-pal seekers, lists of helpful counselors, lawyers, and mentors.

The Teenage Liberation Handbook by Grace Llewellyn has chapters on hands-on community based English, Math, Biology, Foreign Language, sports, history, and

more. Each chapter also includes great reading list recommendations. The book is available at libraries (don't forget inter-library loan) or Holt Associates. Grace's WEB page for her yearly Not-Back-To-School Camp is <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/7325>.

Home School Source Book by Donn Reed. The chapter on "Free or Almost Free Teaching and Learning Aids" alone is worth the cost of the book. Reed reviews all kinds of resources, not restricting himself to the usual homeschooling curricula, but instead concentrating on Real Books, tapes, materials from private and government agencies, and much more.

Leaders of State & Local Homeschooling Organizations can often help you find resources in your community. Be part of the information pipeline by joining local and state support groups and by contributing when you find a good resource. Additionally, stay current by reading publications like *Home Education Magazine*.

That's it. Like other networkers, I will now ask for your advice and your help. What other suggestions do you have for finding resources? Please let me know at 375 Plancha Way, Arroyo Grande, California 93420 or email <cfcohen@pacbell.net>. Thanks!

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Cafi Cohen, homeschooling mom, is the author of ***"And What About College?" How Homeschooling Leads To Admissions To The Best Colleges and Universities, 2nd Edition*** (Holt Associates, 2000) and ***Homeschooling: The Teen Years*** (Prima, 2000). She writes columns for *Home Education Magazine*, *Homeschooling Today*, and the *LINK*. Her website, Homeschool-Teens-College, contains helps for families homeschoooling 11-18 year-olds at www.homeschoolteenscollege.net. She also presents workshops at homeschool conferences nationwide. For more information, contact her at: 805 473-4963 or 473-9045 or at cfcohen@pacbell.net.